

Latin America



From tropical rain forests to snow capped mountains to deserts, the countries of the Caribbean, Central and South America are full of surprises. An hour plane ride can take you from the highlands of the equator and eternal spring to the tropical coast and eternal summer. There is such a tremendous assortment of cultures, races and politics that to automatically lump all the countries together is an injustice. If you think of European, Indian and African elements all mixed together with old and new influences thrown in as well, you will have a hint of the picture!

In this vast area of so many diverse peoples, the common bond of the Spanish language goes a long way in keeping open the lines of communication. Although Brazilians speak Portuguese, and because of the great similarity of the Portuguese and Spanish languages, the people of this region have very little difficulty speaking with each other.

There are so many things to see and do no matter what your interest. If you have a love of antiquity, museums abound in pre-Colombian artifacts. For the adventuresome, there is scaling the heights of Machu Picchu, the ancient Incan stronghold. For the sports fan and athlete, there is world class soccer, major league baseball, skiing in the Andes in July and boating on the Amazon or the bay of Rio. Newcomers will enjoy the fiestas, religious festivals and patriotic celebrations which are also a part of this culture.

Since each country is so different, one can only rely on the basic rules of listening and watching for hints of the proper local customs. Shaking hands is customary on arrival and departure, and once friends, an embrace and kiss are exchanged.

When you host a party, your company may bring friends or relatives with them without letting you know ahead of time, so be prepared for several more just in case. If you are invited to dinner, a small gift of flowers for your host and hostess is in order. If you know ahead of time that your host has children, a small gift of candies for them would be a nice gesture.

Once a strong friendship is formed you may be invited to stay overnight or over a weekend. Bring a thank-you gift with you to

give to your hostess before you leave. If staying for an extended period of time, ask your host what, if anything, would be an appropriate gift for his household help. Family ties are very strong and include the grandparents as well as cousins, aunts, uncles and extended family.

Women are sheltered and more protected than we are accustomed to, while men generally enjoy a great deal of freedom. However, the role of the woman in the work place and government is changing and evolving just as it is for her sisters to the North. This progress has been slow in coming but increasingly women are found in all aspects of professional life.

Travel guide books will acquaint you with the many restaurants and places to stay as well as the sights to see. Restaurants offer everything from native food to continental cuisine. In fact, the largest Japanese community outside of the island nation is in Sao Paulo, Brazil where you can enjoy some of the very best sushi. Explore and enjoy!

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Assistance Program
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